

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE MIDDLE DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA**

| | | |
|--------------------------|---|----------------------|
| UNITED STATES OF AMERICA |) | CRIMINAL NO. |
| |) | |
| v. |) | (Judge Kosik) |
| |) | |
| ROBERT K. MERICLE |) | ELECTRONICALLY FILED |

PLEA AGREEMENT

The following plea agreement is entered into by and between the United States Attorney for the Middle District of Pennsylvania and the above-captioned defendant. Any reference to the United States or to the Government in this Agreement shall mean the office of the United States Attorney for the Middle District of Pennsylvania.

The defendant and counsel for both parties agree that the United States Sentencing Commission Guidelines which took effect on November 1, 1987, as amended and interpreted by United States v. Booker, 125 S. Ct. 738 (2005), will apply to the offenses to which the defendant is pleading guilty.

1. Waiver of Indictment/Plea of Guilty. The defendant agrees to waive indictment by a grand jury and plead guilty to a felony information which will be filed against the defendant by the United States Attorney for the Middle District of

Pennsylvania. That information will charge the defendant with a violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 4, misprision of a felony (filing a false tax return). The maximum penalty for that offense is imprisonment for a period of three years, a fine of \$250,000, a maximum term of supervised release of up to one year, to be determined by the court, which shall be served at the conclusion of and in addition to any term of imprisonment, the costs of prosecution, denial of certain federal benefits as well as an assessment in the amount of \$100.00. At the time the guilty plea is entered, the defendant shall admit to the Court that the defendant is, in fact, guilty of the offense charged in the information. The United States parties agree that the tax loss is greater than \$200,000 but less than \$400,000. The defendant further agrees that any legal and factual issues relating to the application of the Federal Sentencing Guidelines to the defendant's conduct, including facts that support any specific offense characteristic or other enhancement or adjustment and the appropriate sentence within the statutory maximums provided for by law, will be determined by the court after briefing, or a pre-sentence hearing, or at a sentencing hearing. In the event that the defendant subsequently successfully vacates or sets aside any plea, conviction or sentence imposed pursuant to this plea agreement, the defendant further agrees to waive any defense to the filing of additional charges which could have been brought against the defendant at the

time of this plea based upon laches, the assertion of any speedy trial rights, any applicable statute of limitations, or any other grounds.

2. Supervised Release. The defendant also understands that the Court must impose a term of supervised release following any sentence of imprisonment exceeding one (1) year, or when required by statute. The Court may require a term of supervised release in any other case. In addition, the defendant understands that as a condition of any term of supervised release or probation, the Court must order that the defendant cooperate in the collection of a DNA sample if the collection of a sample is so authorized by law.

3. Maximum Sentence. The defendant understands that the total, maximum possible sentence for all charges is the combination of penalties described above; that is 3 years in prison and/or fines totaling \$250,000, a term of supervised release to be determined by the Court, the costs of prosecution, denial of certain federal benefits and an assessment totaling \$100.00.

4. Fine. The defendant understands that the Court may impose a fine pursuant to the Sentencing Reform Act of 1984. The willful failure to pay any fine imposed by the Court, in full, may be considered a breach of this plea agreement. Further, the defendant acknowledges that willful failure to pay the fine may subject the defendant to additional criminal violations and civil penalties

pursuant to Title 18, United States Code, Section 3611, et seq.

5. Inmate Financial Responsibility Program. If the Court awards a fine or restitution as part of the defendant's sentence, and the sentence includes a term of imprisonment, the defendant agrees to voluntarily enter the United States Bureau of Prisons-administered program known as the Inmate Financial Responsibility Program through which the Bureau of Prisons will collect up to 50% of the defendant's prison salary and apply those amounts on the defendant's behalf to the payment of the outstanding fine and restitution orders.

6. Special Assessment. The defendant understands that the Court will impose a special assessment of \$100.00 pursuant to the provisions of Title 18, United States Code, Section 3013. No later than the date of sentencing, the defendant or defendant's counsel shall mail a check in payment of the special assessment directly to the Clerk, United States District Court Middle District of Pennsylvania. This check should be made payable to "Clerk, United States District Court". Counsel for the defendant shall provide a copy of the special assessment check or a Clerk's receipt to the United States Attorney's Office for the Middle District of Pennsylvania at the time of sentencing certifying compliance with this provision of the plea agreement. If the defendant intentionally fails to make this payment, pays with an insufficient funds check, or otherwise fails to comply with

any of the requirements of the United States Attorney's Office's Financial Litigation Unit regarding the special assessment, it is understood that this failure may be treated as a breach of this plea agreement and may result in further prosecution or the filing of additional criminal charges, or a contempt citation.

7. Financial Litigation Unit Investigation. The defendant agrees, as a part of this agreement, to submit to interviews by the United States Attorney's Office's Financial Litigation Unit regarding the defendant's financial status. As part of this process, the defendant, whether represented by counsel or not, consents to contact by and communication with the Financial Litigation Unit, and regarding representation by undersigned counsel, the defendant and counsel consent to contact by and communication with the Financial Litigation Unit and agree to waive any prohibition against communication with a represented party by the United States Attorney's Office regarding defendant's financial status. Pursuant to Title 18, United States Code, Section 3664 (d)(3) the defendant also agrees to complete the required financial affidavit, fully describing the defendant's financial resources within 10 days of the guilty plea. The defendant will submit the original affidavit, on forms prescribed by the probation office, to the U.S. Probation Office with a copy to the United States Attorney's office.

8. No Further Prosecution. The United States Attorney's Office for the

Middle District of Pennsylvania agrees that it will not bring any other criminal charges against the defendant directly arising out of the Government's investigation into public corruption in Luzerne County involving PA Childcare and Western PA Childcare.

9. Acceptance of Responsibility—Two Levels. Counsel for the defendant has affirmatively indicated to the United States Attorney's Office that the defendant not only wishes to enter a plea of guilty, but will clearly demonstrate a recognition and affirmative acceptance of responsibility as required by the sentencing guidelines. Accordingly, if the defendant can adequately demonstrate this acceptance of responsibility to the government, the United States Attorney's Office hereby moves at sentencing that the defendant receive a two-level reduction in the defendant's offense level for acceptance of responsibility. The failure of the Court to find that the defendant is entitled to this two-level reduction shall not be a basis to void this plea agreement.

10. Specific Sentencing Guidelines Recommendations. With respect to the application of the United States Sentencing Commission Sentencing Guidelines to the defendant's conduct, the parties agree to recommend as follows:

The initial offense Level is 20: Tax loss in excess of \$200,000 but less than \$400,000 (Level 18), applying an additional 2 levels for the

use of sophisticated means (Level 20); subtracting 9 levels under the guidelines for 18 U.S.C. §4 (Level 11), subtracting two levels for full acceptance of responsibility (Level 9); making for an offense level of 9 (Criminal History Category I). The resulting guideline range is 4-10 months. The parties agree that no other enhancement or upward adjustment applies in calculating the applicable Sentencing Guideline range.

At the time of sentencing, the United States will recommend that the Court impose the minimum sentence within the applicable, ultimate guideline range.

11. Special Conditions of Probation/Supervised Release. If probation or a term of supervised release is ordered, the United States may recommend that the court impose one or more special conditions, including but not limited to the following:

- (a) The defendant be prohibited from possessing a firearm or other dangerous weapon.
- (b) The defendant pay any fine imposed in accordance with a schedule to be determined by the court.
- (c) The defendant be directed to provide the probation office and the United States Attorney access to any requested financial information.
- (d) The defendant be ordered to perform community service.

12. Contribution. On the date hereof, Robert K. Mericle has voluntarily

offered and has contributed the sum of \$2,150,000 for the purpose of funding programs for the health, safety and general welfare of children of Luzerne County, Pennsylvania. The funds are to be held in an escrow account of William J. Winning, Esquire, Cozen O'Connor, counsel for Robert K. Mericle. The funds will be dispersed to appropriate organizations for the above described purposes by order of the Court pursuant to recommendations which will be submitted by the parties at a later date.

13. Substantial Assistance. The defendant has agreed to cooperate with the United States. Upon completion of the cooperation, if the United States believes the defendant has provided "substantial assistance" pursuant to Section 5K1.1 of the United States Sentencing Guidelines, the United States may request the Court to depart below the guideline range when fixing a sentence for this defendant. In the event that the defendant renders substantial assistance, the United States specifically reserves the right to make a specific recommendation of a term of months to the District Court. However, the defendant acknowledges that the United States may decline to exercise its discretion and recommend a departure if the defendant breaches any of the provisions of this Agreement, commits any other offense while awaiting plea or sentencing, or if the defendant's plea involved a guilty plea to an offense which reduces the defendant's maximum possible

sentence below the guidelines imprisonment range otherwise called for by the Sentencing Guidelines in this case. Should the United States move for a downward departure based upon substantial assistance, it will recommend a sentence at the bottom of the ultimate guideline range.

14. Cooperation. The defendant has agreed to cooperate with the United States by providing information concerning the unlawful activities of others. Pursuant to USSG §1B1.8, the United States agrees that self-incriminating information so provided will not be used against the defendant in determining the applicable guideline range except to the extent provided in this agreement. This provision, however, shall not be applied to restrict the use of information:

- (a) known to the United States prior to entering into the cooperation agreement;
- (b) concerning the existence of prior convictions and sentences;
- (c) in a prosecution for perjury, giving a false statement, or obstruction of justice;
- (d) in the event there is a breach of the cooperation agreement.

15. Background Information for Probation Office. The defendant also understands that the United States will provide to the United States Probation Office all information in its possession which the United States deems relevant

regarding the defendant's background, character, cooperation, if any, and involvement in this or other offenses.

16. Objections to Pre-Sentence Report. The defendant understands that pursuant to the United States District Court for the Middle District of Pennsylvania "Policy for Guideline Sentencing" both the United States and defendant must communicate to the probation officer within fourteen (14) days after disclosure of the pre-sentence report any objections they may have as to material information, sentencing classifications, sentencing guideline ranges and policy statements contained on or omitted from the report. The defendant agrees to meet with the United States at least five (5) days prior to sentencing in a good faith attempt to resolve any substantive differences. If any issues remain unresolved, they shall be communicated to the probation officer for his inclusion on an addendum to the pre-sentence report. The defendant agrees that unresolved substantive objections will be decided by the court after briefing, or a pre-sentence hearing, or at the sentencing hearing where the standard of proof will be a preponderance of the evidence, and the Federal Rules of Evidence, other than with respect to privileges, shall not apply under Fed. R. Evid. 1101(d)(3), and the court may consider any reliable evidence, including hearsay. Objections by the defendant to the pre-sentence report or the Court's rulings, will not be grounds for

withdrawal of a plea of guilty.

17. Victims' Rights. The defendant understands that pursuant to the Victim and Witness Protection Act, the Justice for All Act, and the regulations promulgated under those Acts by the Attorney General of the United States, crime victims have the following rights:

- (a) The right to be reasonably protected from the accused.
- (b) The right to reasonable, accurate, and timely notice of any public court proceeding or any parole proceeding, involving the crime or of any release or escape of the accused.
- (c) The right not to be excluded from any such public court proceeding, unless the court, after receiving clear and convincing evidence determines that testimony by the victim would be materially altered if the victim heard other testimony at that proceeding.
- (d) The right to be reasonably heard at any public proceeding in the district court involving release, plea, sentencing, or any parole proceeding. The defendant understands that the victim's comments and recommendations at any of these proceedings may be different than those of the parties to this agreement.
- (e) The reasonable right to confer with the attorney for the Government in the case. The defendant understands that the victim's opinions and recommendations given to the attorney for the Government may be different than those presented by the United States as a consequence of this agreement.
- (f) The right to full and timely restitution as provided for by law. The attorney for the Government is required to "fully advocate the rights of victims on the issue of restitution unless such advocacy would unduly prolong or complicate the sentencing proceeding," and the Court is authorized to order restitution by the defendant including, but not limited to, restitution for property loss, economic loss, personal injury, or death.

(g) The right to proceedings free from unreasonable delay.

(h) The right to be treated with fairness and with respect for the victim's dignity and privacy.

18. Relevant Sentencing Information. At the sentencing, the United States will be permitted to bring to the Court's attention, and the Court will be permitted to consider, all relevant information with respect to the defendant's background, character and conduct including the conduct that is the subject of the charges which the United States has agreed to dismiss, and the nature and extent of the defendant's cooperation, if any. The United States will be entitled to bring to the Court's attention and the Court will be entitled to consider any failure by the defendant to fulfill any obligation under this agreement.

19. Maximum Sentence. The defendant understands that the Court is not a party to and is not bound by this agreement nor any recommendations made by the parties. Thus, the Court is free to impose upon the defendant any sentence up to and including the maximum sentence of imprisonment for 3 years, a fine of \$250,000, a maximum term of supervised release of up to one year, which shall be served at the conclusion of and in addition to any term of imprisonment, the costs of prosecution, denial of certain federal benefits and assessments totaling \$100.00.

20. No Withdrawal of Plea Based on Sentence or Recommendations. If the

Court imposes a sentence with which the defendant is dissatisfied, the defendant will not be permitted to withdraw any guilty plea for that reason alone, nor will the defendant be permitted to withdraw any pleas should the Court decline to follow any recommendations by any of the parties to this agreement.

21. Full Cooperation. The defendant agrees to cooperate fully with the United States. The defendant understands and agrees that complete and truthful cooperation is a material condition of this agreement. Cooperation shall include providing all information known to the defendant regarding any criminal activity, including but not limited to the offenses described in this agreement. Cooperation will also include complying with all reasonable instructions from the United States, submitting to interviews by investigators and attorneys at such reasonable times and places to be determined by counsel for the United States and to testify fully and truthfully before any grand juries, hearings, trials or any other proceedings where the defendant's testimony is deemed by the United States to be relevant. This may include submitting to interviews and testifying at proceedings after defendant has been sentenced in this matter. The defendant understands that such cooperation shall be provided to any state, local and federal law enforcement agencies designated by counsel for the United States. The United States agrees that any statements made by the defendant during the cooperation phase of this

agreement shall not be used against the defendant in any subsequent prosecutions unless and until there is a determination by the Court that the defendant has breached this agreement. However, subject to the limitations of paragraph 12 above and USSG §1B1.8, the United States will be free to use at sentencing in this case any of the statements and evidence provided by the defendant during the cooperation phase of the agreement. Moreover, the parties agree that, although the defendant's statements made during the cooperation phase cannot be used against the defendant in any subsequent criminal prosecution, this provision shall not preclude the United States from requiring the defendant to submit to interviews by local, state or federal agencies which may use these statements in civil or administrative proceedings involving the defendant. The defendant waives and agrees to waive any rights under the Speedy Trial Act and understands and agrees that sentencing may be delayed until the cooperation phase has been completed so that at sentencing the Court will have the benefit of all relevant information.

22. Polygraph Examination. The defendant, if requested by the attorney for the United States, agrees to submit to polygraph examinations by a polygrapher selected by the United States. It is understood that neither party is waiving the issue of whether or not the polygraph is admissible in a hearing or in any subsequent proceeding.

23. Breach of Agreement. In the event the United States believes the defendant has failed to fulfill any obligations under this agreement, then the United States shall, in its discretion, have the option of petitioning the Court to be relieved of its obligations. Whether or not the defendant has completely fulfilled all of the obligations under this agreement shall be determined by the Court in an appropriate proceeding at which any disclosures and documents provided by the defendant shall be admissible and at which the United States shall be required to establish any breach by a preponderance of the evidence. In order to establish any breach by the defendant, the United States is entitled to rely on statements and evidence given by the defendant during the cooperation phase of this agreement.

24. Remedies for Breach. The defendant and the United States agree that in the event the Court concludes that the defendant has breached the agreement:

- (a) The defendant will not be permitted to withdraw any guilty plea tendered under this agreement and agrees not to petition for withdrawal of any guilty plea;
- (b) The United States will be free to make any recommendations to the Court regarding sentencing in this case;
- (c) Any evidence or statements made by the defendant during the cooperation phase will be admissible at any trials or sentencings;

(d) The United States will be free to bring any other charges it has against the defendant, including any charges originally brought against the defendant or which may have been under investigation at the time of the plea. The defendant waives and hereby agrees not to raise any defense to the reinstatement of these charges based upon collateral estoppel, Double Jeopardy or other similar grounds.

25. Further Prosecution for Perjury, False Statement, Etc. Nothing in this agreement shall protect the defendant in any way from prosecution for any offense committed after the date of this agreement, including perjury, false declaration, or false statement, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1621, 1623, or 1001, or obstruction of justice, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1503, 1505, or 1510, should the defendant commit any of those offenses during the cooperation phase of this agreement. Should the defendant be charged with any offense alleged to have occurred after the date of this agreement, the information and documents disclosed to the United States during the course of the cooperation could be used against the defendant in any such prosecution.

26. Status of Professional License. It is further understood and agreed that the status of any professional license held by the defendant is not protected by this agreement and is a matter solely within the discretion of the appropriate licensing authority. The United States may in its discretion provide to any such licensing

authority any documents and information in its possession.

27. Transfer of Case to IRS. The defendant agrees to interpose no objection to the United States transferring evidence or providing information concerning the defendant and/or this offense, to other state and federal agencies or other organizations, including, but not limited to the Internal Revenue Service, law enforcement agencies and licensing and regulatory agencies.

28. Collection Action by IRS. Nothing in this agreement shall limit the Internal Revenue Service in its collection of any taxes, interest or penalties due from the defendant arising out of or related in any way to the offenses identified in this agreement.

29. Rule 6(e) Order for Transfer of Information to IRS. The defendant agrees to interpose no objections to the entry of an order under Fed.R.Crim.P. 6(e) authorizing transfer to the Examination Division of the Internal Revenue Service of the defendant's documents, or documents of third persons, in possession of the Grand Jury, the United States Attorney or the Criminal Investigation Division of the Internal Revenue Service.

30. Cooperation with IRS. The defendant agrees to fully comply and cooperate with the Internal Revenue Service by filing all delinquent or amended tax returns by the date of the defendant's sentencing, and to timely file all future

returns which may come due during the term of incarceration, probation or supervised release. The defendant also agrees to cooperate with the Internal Revenue Service by furnishing the Internal Revenue Service with all information pertaining to the defendant's assets and liabilities, as well as all documentation in support of tax returns filed by the defendant during the term of any sentence imposed pursuant to this guilty plea. The defendant further agrees to pay all taxes, interests and penalties due and owing to the United States and otherwise fully comply with the tax laws of the United States. The defendant understands, and agrees, that this requirement of full compliance with federal tax laws may be made a condition of any probation or supervised release imposed in this case.

31. Appeal Waiver. The defendant is aware that Title 18, United States Code, Section 3742 affords a defendant the right to appeal the conviction and sentence imposed. Acknowledging all of this, the defendant knowingly waives the right to appeal any conviction and sentence within the sentencing guideline range, on any and all grounds set forth in Title 18, United States Code, Section 3742 or any other grounds, constitutional or non-constitutional, including the manner in which that sentence was determined in light of United States v. Booker, 125 S. Ct. 738 (2005). The defendant retains the right to appeal the reasonableness of any sentence which varies above the sentencing guideline range. The defendant also

waives the defendant's right to challenge any conviction or sentence or the manner in which the sentence was determined in any collateral proceeding, including but not limited to a motion brought under Title 28, United States Code, Section 2255. The defendant further acknowledges that this appeal waiver is binding only upon the defendant, and that the United States retains its right to appeal in this case.

32. Agreement Not Binding on Other Agencies. Nothing in this agreement shall bind any other United States Attorney's Office, state prosecutor's office or federal, state or local law enforcement agency. The United States represents that it is unaware of any state, federal or local investigation involving the defendant or the subject matter of this prosecution. The United States further agrees that any information provided by the defendant to it will not be turned over to other law enforcement authorities unless and until they agree to be bound by the terms and conditions of this agreement.

33. Violation of Law While Plea or Sentence Pending. The defendant understands that it is a condition of this plea agreement that the defendant refrain from any further violations of state, local or federal law while awaiting plea and sentencing under this agreement. The defendant acknowledges and agrees that if the government receives information that the defendant has committed new crimes while awaiting plea and /or sentencing in this case, the government may petition

the Court and, if the Court finds by a preponderance of the evidence that the defendant has committed any other criminal offense while awaiting plea or sentencing, the Government shall be free at its sole election to either: A) withdraw from this agreement, or B) make any sentencing recommendations to the Court that it deems appropriate. The defendant further understands and agrees that, if the Court finds that the defendant has committed any other offense while awaiting plea or sentencing, the defendant will not be permitted to withdraw any guilty pleas tendered pursuant to this plea agreement, and the government will be permitted to bring any additional charges which it may have against the defendant.

34. Plea Agreement Serves Ends of Justice. The United States is entering into this Plea Agreement with the defendant because this disposition of the matter fairly and adequately addresses the gravity of the series of offenses from which the charges are drawn, as well as the defendant's role in such offenses, thereby serving the ends of justice.

35. Merger of All Prior Negotiations. This document states the complete and only Plea Agreement between the United States Attorney for the Middle District of Pennsylvania and the defendant in this case, and is binding only on the parties to this agreement, supersedes all prior understandings, if any, whether written or oral, and cannot be modified other than in writing that is signed by all

parties or on the record in Court. No other promises or inducements have been or will be made to the defendant in connection with this case, nor have any predictions or threats been made in connection with this plea. Pursuant to Rule 11 of the Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure the defendant certifies that the defendant's plea is knowing and voluntary, and is not the result of force or threats or promises apart from those promises set forth in this written plea agreement.

36. Deadline for Acceptance of Plea Agreement. The original of this agreement must be signed by the defendant and defense counsel and received by the United States Attorney's Office on or before 5:00 p.m., July 31, 2009, otherwise the offer may, in the sole discretion of the Government, be deemed withdrawn.

37. Required Signatures. None of the terms of this agreement shall be binding on the Office of the United States Attorney for the Middle District of Pennsylvania until signed by the defendant and defense counsel and until signed by the United States Attorney.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have read this agreement and carefully reviewed every part of it with my attorney. I fully understand it and I voluntarily agree to it.

July 31, 2009
Date

Robert K. Mericle
ROBERT K. MERICLE,
Defendant

I am the defendant's counsel. I have carefully reviewed every part of this agreement with the defendant. To my knowledge my client's decision to enter into this agreement is an informed and voluntary one.

31 July 2009
Date

William J. Winning PAC
WILLIAM WINNING, Esquire
Counsel for Defendant Robert Mericle

Date

JOSHUA LOCK, ESQUIRE
Counsel for Defendant Robert Mericle

7-31-09
Date

Martin C. Carlson
MARTIN C. CARLSON
United States Attorney